



‘Soldiers’ Magazine Spotlights IMCOM

(The newly-formed Installation Management Command, formerly Installation Management Agency, received a review of its mission and history in the November 2006 issue of Soldiers Magazine. The following article appears here by permission of Soldiers.)

ARLINGTON, Va. –The Installation Management Agency got a lot of attention this year as the Army struggled to find enough base operations money to keep installations providing the services that Soldiers and families expect. Not that funding shortages are new for IMA-- the Army’s installation manager has managed cash flow crises for its entire four-year life.

Yet the organization’s role in Soldiers’ lives is much greater and more positive than most people know. Some of the grass got long and some swimming pools didn’t open last summer, but most Army leaders agree that this year could have been much worse had IMA not closely managed installation funding and stood ready to respond to emergencies.

Now the Army has validated IMA’s role in managing installations by giving it full command authority as the Installation Management Command, or IMCOM. The new command, headed by the Army’s three-star Assistant Chief of Staff for Installation Management, reports to the secretary of the Army on installation issues, and encompasses the former IMA, as well as the Community and Family Support Center and the Army Environmental Center.

“This new command is the logical next step in the evolution of IMA,” Lt. Gen. Robert Wilson, the ACSIM, said when the IMCOM transition was announced in August. “This major organizational change will create a far more effective, efficient and agile organization to ensure that the world’s best Army is supported on the world’s best installations.”

The transition at the end of IMA’s fourth year offers a good opportunity to look at the short life of centralized installation management. Since IMA has operated largely behind the scenes, as IMCOM will, the Army world often sees IMA initiatives without knowing where they came from.



IMA was conceived in 2001 of Army transformation, born and baptized through the nation's entry into war following the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. It officially activated on Oct. 1, 2002. The concept of centralizing installation management had been discussed and debated for years, and the Navy had already implemented a form of regionalized installation management. Former Army secretary Thomas White gave the order to implement a Transformation of Installation Management organization in early 2001, and designated two senior executive civilians to create and staff the organization.

IMA was created with a headquarters established in a building under renovation in Crystal City, Va. The installations were organized under seven regions—four in the continental U.S. and three overseas. The agency had a major general director, two senior executive deputies and a command sergeant Major. The regions were each headed by SES civilians except Korea region, which was and still is headed by a brigadier general.

Centralized installation management was intended to enable transforming installations into the “flagships of readiness” needed to support a transformed, expeditionary Army, but it was also intended to solve problems as old as the Army itself. Installations have always been “owned” by the local mission commander, who funded base operations according to his own priorities.

Funding levels and installation standards fluctuated widely, leading to have and have-not installations. BASOPS was invariably under funded as commanders, for good reasons, tended to fund mission readiness ahead of facilities and services.

On the other hand, when the installation needed additional funding, the local commander usually had backup mission funding to divert to whatever installation issue might unexpectedly arise. With this approach to funding, fiscal train wrecks could be avoided, but installation funding was always unpredictable. And the Army leadership has never known how much it costs to run an installation.

IMA was created to make installation life more predictable by establishing standards and determining accurate costs for installation services. Those services include everything from child care to grounds maintenance to training facilities to housing to deployment on 116 installations worldwide. If installations are the flagships of the transformed, expeditionary Army, IMA—now IMCOM—is the often-invisible pilot guiding those flagships.

“We’re changing the Army,” said Brig. Gen. John A. Macdonald, formerly the director of IMA and now deputy commanding general of IMCOM. “We’re intensively involved with force generation, with training and deployment, with Army transformation, with base realignment and closure, and with improving quality of life for Soldiers and their families.”

IMA accomplishments in its short four years run the gamut in terms of installation support to the operational Army:

- In 2002, IMA implemented the Contract Security Guard program that replaced military police with civilian guards at 20 CONUS installations, freeing 4,000 Soldiers from gate guard duties;
- The same year, IMA MWR purchased and delivered \$13.5 million worth of recreational equipment for deployed Soldiers and civilians;

- In 2003, IMA mobilized, trained, validated, deployed and billeted more than 149,000 reserve component Soldiers in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom;
- In 2004, some 350,000 Soldiers mobilized and demobilized through IMA installations in direct support of the Global War on Terror—twice as many as Army Europe in May 1945;
- Last year, IMA implemented the \$252 million Barracks Improvement Program to improve living conditions for nearly 40,000 Soldiers in 339 substandard barracks;
- This year, training barracks are getting the same treatment, improving life for some 86,000 trainees when the work is done;
- Despite the base operations funding shortage, IMA spent more on facilities maintenance and restoration the past three years than was spent the past 10 years combined.

While a few Soldiers remain in IMCOM—most notably garrison commanders, command sergeants major and chaplains, most of the organization is civilians who work for the Soldiers. Civilian logisticians operate railheads and central issue facilities; civilian carpenters, painters and ventilation specialists repair and refurbish barracks; civilian personnel specialists keep personnel records and issue IDs. IMCOM civilians operate ranges, develop training plans, maintain environmental standards, and enforce security and force protection measures.

In the next few years, IMCOM will shrink to two regions in the U.S. and consolidate most of the command at Fort Sam Houston, Texas in accordance with base realignment and closure law. The west region will locate with the headquarters at Fort Sam Houston, while the east region will reside at Fort Eustis, Va. The overseas regions will remain unchanged for the moment.

IMA was created to innovate, and IMCOM will take that effort to the next level to find new and better ways to do business. Never was innovation needed more than now because the prospects of getting more installation funding in the foreseeable future are slim to none. At the same time, the top quality, all-volunteer force needs to be sustained.

IMCOM's most pressing commitment to Soldiers and senior mission commanders is to focus its efforts on providing the right set of critical services and either divesting the others or partnering with local communities to buy or share services.

The coming years will see considerable change, but installation stakeholders need to understand that IMCOM decision makers won't be working in isolation. Despite rumors already circulating, IMCOM will not close any facilities or stop providing any services without hearing input from residents, senior mission commanders and other stakeholders on the installation.

"We are committed to ensuring that the critical programs and services on which our Soldiers and their families rely will continue seamlessly throughout this transition period," Wilson said.

(Article by Ned Christensen, Chief of Public Affairs, IMCOM HQ)

